"Like A Mosquito Attacking An Elephant": Perceptions Among Israeli Talkbackers Regarding Female Violence

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine what are the perceptions among Israeli "Talkbackers" towards female violence against their partners. For this purpose we sampled twenty online articles regarding female violence. The study analyses the main themes that arises from the talkbacks appearing at the bottom of those articles. In now days of technological era, the internet forms a stage for many debates in general and controversial debates in particular, such as the issue of female violence towards men. The talkback, due to its unique characteristics, e.g. comment spontaneity and the ability to maintain anonymity, has made the commenters' perceptions and positions more authentic even in such a "sensitive" matter, especially in the Israeli society, in which many still harbor patriarchal familial perceptions. The study shows that Israeli talkbackers maintain traditional opinions and stereotypical positions towards female violence against men, and the further the case got from the common prototype of domestic violence – i.e. a man beating his female partner – talkbackers expressed more stereotypical responses regarding gender roles. In addition, the study found a lenient and forgiving attitude towards the women's violent behavior towards men, as well as a sense of gender inequality in the law enforcement system and the media and misogyny towards feminism in particular.

INTRODUCTION

The academic discussion about female violence has significantly advanced in recent years. In Israel, 25.9% of the women who were arrested or detained during the year of 2010, were kept in prison for domestic violence (Chen & Einat, 2010). A study that investigated female crimes in Israel between the years 2000-2010 found that female crimes during this decade form 11% of all crimes committed in those years, where domestic violence was 31% of all crimes that involved women (Rothchild, 2012). Different studies found that in case of violence between partners, women were as violent as men or even more violent than them (Ben-David, 2014). The feminist movements that brought the issue of domestic violence into the public sphere focused the attention on male violence towards women, and simultaneously somewhat rejected any discourse regarding the existence of female violence and male victimization (Wilchek-Aviad & Mazeh, 2014). Female violence in relationships undermines the common perception and social expectations from both women and men (Zaltsman & Baum 2014). Unlike the behavior expected from boys during early socialization processes, aggressive behavior by girls is considered selfish and inappropriate (Zaltsman & Baum 2014). Furthermore, the social expectation from victims is having difficulties with seeing a man as a victim of domestic violence, thus forms another obstacle in the recognition of female violence in relationships as a phenomenon (Kelly, 2003; Neftov, 2014).

Until the last two decades, professional literature mainly revolved around male criminals while the interest in female violence was very limited and marginal. If female violence did get any attention, the criminal women would be portrayed as women who suffers from a certain pathology, sexual and biological dysfunctions, mental illness or other various deviations

(Ajzenstadt, Soffer & Steinberg, 2010). In addition, a great deal of the explanations for female crimes were based on misogynist views which presented the criminals as evil, cunning, passive, immoral and easily receding back to crime. They were perceived as victims of the feminine, pathological body, which tends to moral destruction. None of the theories considered the criminal woman as an individual with rational thinking and judgment abilities (Ajzenstadt, Soffer & Steinberg, 2010). One additional claim that accompanied the public discussion was that the law enforcement system exhibited a "chivalrous" attitude towards women: policemen avoided from arresting them and even if they did get arrested, their penalty was very short-term incarceration (Gur, 2002). Even in the legal system, women were treated more gently than men. The State's paternalism, which is expressed by the court's verdicts, is explained as the need to be considerate towards women in order to maintain family unity, and so women who care for children are treated more forgivingly than single ones (Hod, 2002). However, Ajzenstadt, Soffer and Steinberg (2010) argue that in certain cases, when the crime is a violent crime that is perceived as "unladylike" and breaches social expectations of the feminine model, the woman will suffer a harsher, sterner attitude. The feminist approaches claim that the biological determinism places the woman in a framework of stereotypes that referred to the criminal woman as a bad, motherly or unmotherly and insane individual (Rimmlet, 2001; Leonard, 1982; Heidenson, 1987). Another criticism was that traditional criminology presents the woman's character in a drastic dichotomy, between the ideal woman who is motherly, caring and busy with the housework and the criminal-monsterous woman who is so deviant she is presented as more masculine than feminine (Brown, 1986).

A criminal woman is perceived as a double deviation: once because she has acted against the law, and again because she deviated from her traditional feminine role (Kimmel. 2002). Gur (2002) adds that the perception of the double deviation is dangerous since it may lead to paternalism, as well as, defensiveness and excessive punishment towards women. In addition, studies shows that most female offender consider themselves as "spoiled good" due to the double stigma. Female offenders feel stigmatization far stronger than male offenders, because their crimes are rarer and are even treated as bigger sensations in the media (Carlen, 1983; Kimmel, 2002).

The common definition when studying female aggressiveness describes it as "any form of behavior performed by a woman and aimed to induce damage or injury" (Conradi & Geffner, 2009). Aggressive women are divided in the literature to one of two categories: the generally aggressive women and those who are aggressive only towards their partners. Generally aggressive women will characteristically have a criminal record, most of them comes from an abusive childhood background or experienced an abusive relationship. Their motives may be instrumental such as gaining acceptance or control over another (Neftov, 2014). Women, who are aggressive towards their partner only, are not perceived as ones who experienced extensive and harsh violence in their past but as women who learned as adults, via prior or current relationships, that violence is an acceptable and efficient means to handle a conflict and to express anger in a relationship (Kelly, 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the main perceptions among Israeli talkbackers regarding female violence towards their partners, as reflected in the talkbackers' comments to online articles covering news in this subject. Our working assumption is that as farther as the domestic violence case in question will be, in nature and characteristics, from the traditional prototype of domestic violence, we will find more gender-stereotypical expressions, less empathy towards the victim and a more forgiving attitude towards the violent woman. Violent

women will be perceived as "masculine" or suffering from a mental pathology, while the male victim will be considered "unmanly".

Female Violence towards Partners

Violence in relationships is one of the most controversial study topics, but so far the myriad of studies did not manage to assist in solving the conflicts and controversy. Too often, as mentioned above, the issue of men as victims in domestic violence is either denied or disregarded (Ben-David, 2012).

Archer (2000) performed a meta-analysis of over 80 studies conducted around the world regarding spouse violence, he concluded that women do use physical violence against their spouses. The common reasons that the study has found for women's use of physical violence in their relationships were: anger, revenge, a dominance over the spouse (Hines & Asudino, 2003; Neftov, 2014) and an attempt to gain his attention or improve the communication with him (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997). Buchbinder, Sherer and Eisikovits (1997) examined the gaps in men and women's reports on the level of their intimate violence, and found that women were more violent both verbally and physically. They claim that the gap stems from different socialization of men and women in relation to power, morality and world views. In addition, they claim that women's reports on the use of violent tactics to solve conflicts stems from the fact that women call certain behaviors violent even if men do not refer to them as such. The differences in men and women's reports as well as the results of surveys conducted in the United States have pointed to the fact that women can be as violent as men, if not more so (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 2006; Straus & Gelles, 1986 Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn & Saltzman, 2007). Although many studies pointed to equilibrium and reciprocal balance in masculine vs. feminine violence, the idea of a "reciprocal violence" has given rise to a great many criticism (Ben-David, 2014). Protesters argue that usually there are physical and social differences in strength that benefit the man. Moreover, a woman has less experience in physical fights and a much greater economic dependency, which puts her at a greater risk (Saunders, 1988). Furthermore, male violence towards women generates greater fear in the victim than female violence towards men (Belknap & Melton, 2005). A study by Perilla, Frndak, Lillard and East (2003), which focused on women who abuse their partners, found a three-component model: learning, opportunity and choice. "Learning" means that the abusive / violent woman has turned to one through learning, by experiencing intimate or any other kind of violence in her past. Indeed, many studies who studied women who were convicted of domestic violence offences found that the majority of the women in the study reported being victims in their childhood (Swan & Snow, 2003 in Belknap & Melton, 2005). "Opportunity": Perilla et al. (2003) suggest opportunity as an act of vengeance or punishment towards an abusive partner. Nevertheless others may interpret the violent act as self-defense. For example, when an abusive partner drinks until he loses consciousness, the victim decides to take advantage of her assailant's sensitive state and uses violence against him. In such cases, Perilla et al. (2003) argue that the victim became the assailant because she believes that if she will not act violently towards him now, her life will be at risk. Thus the "opportunity" component can be interpreted as self-defense better than as an act of vengeance.

Neftov (2014) emphasizes that there is a significant gap between the common social perception regarding the phenomenon of male victims and their actual feeling and state. This gap was formed because of the social attitude that was molded by stereotypes and myths regarding sex and gender roles as well as the characters of a victim vs. that of an assailant.

Gender and Stereotypes

The word gender is used to describe the differences between men and women that stem from their society and culture and not their biology. Gender defines social perceptions regarding femininity and masculinity in a given society (Rubenstein, 2012). According to Gilad (2007), accepted gender masculine characteristics include decisiveness, dominance, aggressiveness, belligerence, and competitiveness. The common feminine characteristics mainly include lenience, interpersonal sensitivity and empathy, pleasantness, naivety and gentleness. The gender characteristics express the cultural perception of a specific time and location. The study about gender-beliefs shows that people's response to others is based on the masculine / feminine dichotomy. According to this approach, people expect their environment to coordinate itself in a steady system of gender roles, which includes psychological and physiological features. An individual who is feminine or masculine in one aspect of that person's behavior should maintain feminine or masculine behavior in other aspects as well (Rubenstein, 2012). The stereotypical description of the domestic violence victim as relatively powerless, weak and helpless, and as an individual who needs protection, is in agreement with the woman's stereotypical description and completely contradicts the masculine features. This is why when men are the victims of female aggression, the victim's image is often rapidly feminized and his masculinity is being deprived from him (Neftov, 2014).

As mentioned above, society's expectations of women emphasize traits of softness, warmth and affection, consideration and care for others (Caroletta, 2010). These expectations set normative boundaries for women's behavior which define it in terms of "worthy" sexual and moral behavior, teaching moral values to their children and maintaining appropriate family lives. Female offenders are perceived as deviants from those normative boundaries, and are considered as challenging the male hegemony in everything regarding violent behavior (Ajzenstadt & Steinberg, 1997).

Talkbacks and the Online Sphere

The internet is an infrastructure for creating a new kind of public discourse. The high availability of the network, the relatively low costs, the versatile contents one may consume and their authentic, unmediated, unsupervised nature alongside the myriad of variety offered through it have turned the internet into a dominance sphere for discussion and discourse (Cavaglion & Shoham, 2016). The talkback exists in the entire online sphere, but in Israel it holds unique properties. The scope of journalistic websites that enable talkback comments, as well as the talkbacks' connection to the actual article do not exist in online journalism of many Western countries (e.g. England, France, Germany and the United States). In addition, most news websites in Western countries have completely disabled talkbacks in their articles due to the scope of offensive comments (Dror, 2003). The immediate and anonymous nature of talkbacks that appear next to news articles enable a unique freedom of speech that affect the talkbacks' high popularity. Hecht (2003) argues that these properties promote a brutal and rude style of expression. Alongside those who consider talkbacks the arena of a democratic public discourse or a sphere to relieve pressure and frustration, exist others who other consider it a violent rink where the freedom of expression has turned into the freedom of incitement (Negbi, 2012). Rosenthal (2007) claims that talkback serve as the "forum" in the classic-roman sense of the word, and that men are more active there because of their tendency to consider themselves as those in charge. Furthermore, talkbacks have a very competitive and macho foundation, and he argues that there is a phenomenon of feminine self-exclusion and that women prefer not to enter the atmosphere of verbal violence, that is characteristic of

talkbacks. Women's talkbacks will usually appear in articles with a "distinctive feminine characteristic".

Online Misogyny

Misogyny is the longest hatred in history. Simone de Beauvoir explained misogyny by claiming that women in our culture is the "other", and otherness is threatening and frightening; otherness is equal to invalidation (Preminger, 2001). Patriarchal societies tend to encourage socialization and education for obsessive masculinity (Haj-Yahia, 2005). Men are taught, from a young age, to maintain their masculinity, to internalize and be ashamed of any behavior perceived by society as a feminine one (Gerber, 1995). According to Haj-Yahia (2005), this education leads boys to develop hostility towards girls and women. Rosenthal (2010) discusses the online hatred discourse and emphasizes that talkbacks expresses feelings towards the subject of one's hatred – such as contempt, generalization, deligitimization and demonization. The hatred discourse usually refers to a group that is considered an enemy or otherwise hostile, as part of some cultural war. The expressions of hostility towards women are everywhere in the online sphere. The nature of the online network provides a high level of prominence as well as greater legitimacy to expressions of misogyny. Negbi (2010) claims that the online network provoke the rise of prejudice, hostile positions and discriminating attitudes towards women, as well as of the positions regarding gender, that seemed to have disappeared from today's reality, especially in the West, has returned via the internet. As mentioned above, the purpose of this paper is to examine the way Israeli talkbackers refer to domestic violence incidents in which the assailant was a woman and the victim was the man.

METHOD

The qualitative research method selected for this study deals with a reality that manifest a myriad of points of view alongside the inability to eliminate single variables from the general context. By doing that it allows one to follow the complexity from a holistic point of view (Ben-Yehoshua, 2001). The qualitative method searches for a social and cultural connection between the phenomena and revolves around the subjective process within the studied reality (Shkedi, 2003). In order to examine the common public perspectives regarding the studied phenomenon, the study was based on direct online talkbacks comments aimed for twenty articles addressing female violence towards men. The articles were retrieved from Israeli online news and journalism websites, e.g. YNET, Walla!, Nana, and NRG between 2013 and 2015. Each sampled article included at least ten talkbacks (some included far more than that). The search for the articles was done using Google search engine, with keywords and phrases [in Hebrew] e.g. "woman beating her husband", "my wife is beating me", "a woman hit her partner", "men as victims", etc. Articles that did not include a single talkback were excluded from the sample. In addition, articles about women who hurt their children or another woman were also excluded. The various collected talkbacks (380 talkbacks of news articles online) were sorted into six main themes: stereotypes and myths regarding the domestic violence offence, which revolves, among other things, around the societal roles expected from men and women; men as victims; women and pathology; forgiving attitude towards the aggressors; the sense of inequality and misogyny.

FINDINGS
Gender Myths Revolving Domestic Violence

This theme is divided into three groups. The first refers to talkbacks that generally revolve domestic violence offences, as they are perceived by the talkbackers. The other two groups describe stereotypical comments regarding masculine and feminine gender roles.

Societal attitudes towards domestic violence:
The domestic violence offences are considered as reflecting the eternally lasting societal order, according to which a man owns all the power while the woman who is a weak and sensitive creature in nature, cannot withstand the violence used against her. The surfers clarify that as long as the man is the beater and the woman is the beaten, the primal order is maintained.

> *"A man can withstand a woman's beating. A woman can't withstand a man's beating. She is no longer a woman – she turns into a shadow of her former self. Physically and mentally. And in general, her life is at risk… he proved himself not only as a man but also as a human being who belongs to the human society, because he managed to control himself."*
> *"A beaten man loses his masculinity. A beaten woman is still a woman."*
> *"I guess you don't know that men are physically stronger than women, and have a much easier time using physical strength against a woman than a woman against a man. Naturally, the law defends the weak from the stronger one…"*

However, when the order is reversed, the violence is undergoing a reduction process and even renewed interpretation:

> *"Such nonsense. A normal man who is sane in his mind and healthy in body will enjoy any sexual 'harassment' by a woman…"*

FEMININE ROLES
Talkbackers find it hard to see violent women as feminine characters, they attribute the level of female violence to the characteristics of a society which is constantly under a state of war, such as the Israeli society. The description of the violent woman undergoes ridicule and de-familiarization and is based on animal figures or scary creatures presented in movies:

> *"A disgrace, only in Israel women are so unfeminine, not to say brutal on the verse of masculine."*
> *"A mare. I bet she'll end up in prison riding a steed. LOL."*
> *"Wow, that's not a woman, that's ferocious King Kong."*

The ridiculing and de-familiarization of the woman is also based on her characterization as a masculine, homosexual and senseless woman:

> *"Way to go, YNET, publish more articles about dumb lesbians. We're tired of your garbage."*

In one case where a woman slit the throat of her husband, who raped her, and got an alternative punishment of community service, a variety of stereotypical talkbacks was found regarding women's roles in society in general, and her roles as a man's wife in particular:

> *"Where does it say exactly that she suffered violence?… the husband demanded she will have sex with him, as is expected of a married woman, and these intercourse even yielded children…"*

> *"Have the murderer rot in jail! Children should not be allowed to grow in the shadow of such a violent woman… take her children away from her immediately."*

An article that describes the killing of an abusive husband leads to a dual attitude, where on one hand there is great fury against women who use their feminine traits in order to affect the law enforcement system and get a lenient punishment, while on the other hand they wonder how a mother can hurt the father of her children:

> *"Come over to the courts and see the cries of women. Come over to the Knesset and the various committees, come wherever you like and you will see women use their ability to cry, scream and bring up a show just to gain pity, benefits and whatnot…"*

> *"How can a mother do such a thing right next to her baby girl?…" "How cruel can a woman be, damn it that is the father of your children."*

MASCULINE ROLES

The descriptions of female violence towards the women's partners have led talkbackers to repeatedly state the traditional perception of the strong, dominant man, and as a result they expressed a great deal of anger towards men who did not behave as society expects them to. Talkkbackers often use metaphors of reversed balance of power from the natural scenes, in order to illustrate the level of defamiliarization and lack of trust attributed to incidents of violence towards men. The common talkbacks included expressions of ridicule, anger and distrust:

> *"… slap her silly… what are you, a wimp?"*
> *"She is a stupid violent woman and you are a woos – you cannot stay!…"*
> *"expected a man, got a kitten, go ahead and beat her up…"*
> *"If she is so tiny next to you it doesn't count as beating, just divorce and do it fast. I bet you're driving her mad."*
> *"It sounds a little… Come in! surreal… how can it be that he, an athlete with a fairly large body… will let this thing go quietly and not hit her back…"*
> *"Come on, you call that a beating? It's like a mosquito attacking an elephant…"*
> *"I just do not understand why is this idiot keeps on bending… get her out of your sight and go on… what are you, some miserable soul who just stands there and waits to get slapped again? Can't comprehend…"*
> *"What is the deal with this guy? Have him stand up. With a girl so aggressive, no wonder he will cheat."*
> *"A man is a stronger creature than a woman!!"*

MEN AS VICTIMS

Among the different talkbacks commented on the various incidents of violence towards men, as surveyed on the news websites, we could distinguish a unique group of comments. These talkbacks were (allegedly) written by men who identify as victims of female violence and found a "stage" to share their feelings and emotions regarding this issue. These talkbackers in fact fight for self-construction of a victim's identity despite of society's expectation that they would adopt a masculine identity, of an assailant and not an assaulted individual. These men describe the system's distrust towards their being victims, their sense of humiliation and helplessness alongside the attempt to undermine the ridicule that accompanies the various talkbacks of the article:

> *"My wife usually slaps me when I disagree with her about something. I went to the police several times and they did nothing. They just laughed at me…"*

"…by the way, I know a divorcee whose ex-wife is legally abusing him through false complaints about violence. The guy married a witch who pretended to be an angel… she makes his life miserable even still…"

"I was a beaten husband, and it is a shame you people mock this issue. And I'm a thug. I used to get slapped and beaten even in my sleep… due to my case I have helped many beaten women because I knew what is humiliation!… this really isn't something to laugh about, this article."

Other men who commented the articles adopted the societal identity attributed to the beaten man and evaluate themselves as not true men:

"Beaten and humiliated and still a greater man than I am. I married one just like that, with a psychiatric history, because I have a feeble character and an invertebrate's spine… my character's weakness… all I can do is weep for my miserable destiny… I'm a chicken, a coward…"

PATHOLOGY AS AN EXCUSE FOR VIOLENCE

One of the most common claims when a woman is beating her husband is that "something is wrong" with her. The talkbackers attributed the beating woman described in the articles with mental disorders such as mental illnesses or personality disorders. Such talkbacks were in fact less frequent when the woman ended up murdering her spouse.

"Have him send his wife for psychiatric assessment ASAP!!"

"They get this from home. Her mother beat her father as well. Your wife is not entirely mentally balanced. You should talk to a professional expert."

"Diagnosis: she suffers from clinical depression and should get medications + psychotherapy."

"… I hope she finds a different framework after she will get the mental treatment she so desperately needs."

"This kind of woman you should kick out of your life. No point staying with a basket case, she'll eventually end up alone, everyone will eventually realize she is messed up, and you, man of all men, go out there and celebrate and enjoy every moment of it…"

"If the advisor was a little bit more professional she would have realized she is dealing with a mental disorder… you should have no mercy, people with personality disorders are nothing but misery to themselves…"

In one case where a man complained that his wife beats him, a large part of the talkbacks were "recommendations" by talkbackers to document all the incidents in which the woman acted violently against him. According to them, that is the only way anyone will ever believe him – "her sick state will not improve, it will only get worse as she nears menopause or maybe even a few years earlier. Stop, think, consult and plan: record and videotape, use technological means and keep a backup…" "record everything because later you won't be able to prove anything. If she complains, you're in a jam…"

FORGIVING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ASSAULTING WOMAN

It seems that when articles revolved incidents of the murder of a spouse, something about the talkbackers' attitude to the murdering woman changes. Their distrust and ridicule towards the woman and as of anger towards the man, who does not properly fulfill his masculine roles, are now replaced with semi-empathetic responses towards the women who murder their abusive

husband. Where women murdered an abusive husband, talkbakcers transferred the victim's identity from the murdered to the murderer and presented the male spouse as one who deserves his punishment. This group includes talkbacks that "explain" that the woman's behavior stems from helplessness, severe mental distress, continued abuse by her spouse, etc.

"A woman who suffers for so many years ends up in a state of insanity, how much can one person take… you can't always press charges… so a man like her husband who threw things at her and beat her up for years deserves a punishment…"

"Have men learn that our blood is not forfeited… men who beat women should not come crying afterwards…"

"The man beats her – what did you expect her to do? Wait until he murders her?"

"She should be released immediately..!! I think he deserved it… and this without even knowing all the details. There are many like him and I wish them all to meet a similar ending..!!"

"You are not evil. You have suffered… there is no justification for a misery-filled life. Sometimes women think that if they act against the violence it is as if they act against their husbands, and that allegedly makes them into bad or unworthy wives because they were raised to be good and obedient wives…"

"IF IT WAS THE OTHER WAY AROUND" – THE SENSE OF INEQUALITY

This group of talkbacks expresses the sense of inequality and injustice that is attributed by them to the law enforcement system's actions. It should be noted that despite of the forgiving attitude found in this study to murderous women, these comments that express the sense of discrimination in favor of women and the injustice in the actions of the law enforcement system, appeared in each of the twenty articles reviewed in this study.

"The judges are also insane. They will end up pitying her because she has a baby girl, and maybe even give her house arrest at home, with the parents of the murdered victim, and maybe she will simply walk away with an insanity claim…"

"I'm just shocked. Why does women have this privilege? Where do we live? Under the regiment of a feminist of feminine dictatorship? Where is the equality?"

"Court's equality, humiliation of the dead. Should a man murder his wife he will pay the full punishment for his action. And he should pay, no one will question that or accept a claim that the wife hurt him during many year. Should a woman murder her husband she will only pay half her duty, because she is a woman… she will be asked what happened, and they will accept [arguments] such as look here, this whole story is very difficult… after all, the deceased will have a hard time proving otherwise… this is lawlessness on the judges' part. But they are not those who suffer [the consequences], they are those who repeatedly inflict harm in the name of so-called gender equality…"

'I bet she will not get a severe penalty… the countries of the West, including Israel, have long lost their equality between men and women, law always stands by the woman's side… they constantly write about women who suffer in their families, but they will never write about those who reign their houses like tyrants… they forget about female verbal violence which is very common, and men have no legal defense while the women get full defense…"

"Classic example of the crazy differences in this country's penalty between men and women: men will be haunted and put to misery while the women – oh no, she is the 'poor victim' every time."

ONLINE MISOGYNY

This group of talkbacks refers to the expressions of anger and hostility towards the female gender as a rule and feminists in particular. These responses were mostly found in articles discussing the nature of the penalty decided for women who hurt their spouses. In order to illustrate the monstrosity and dangerousness attributed to these women, the talkbackers referred to use of metaphors borrowed from wars against diseases and plagues:

> *"Women can murder, here in Israel… a result of the wild feminism that's been roaming freely in the Western world in general and in Israel in particular…"*
>
> *"Until the feminist germ will not leave the Supreme [court]… the lives of men will be left forfeited [in the eyes of the law]… it's horrifying, what the feminist demon is doing to the Supreme [court]."*
>
> *The Israeli society is mostly traditional in its religious views, and so there was a high frequency of religious terminology in use, dividing characters to good and evil and the use of metaphors which are more familiar and create instinctive associations.*
>
> *"Some women are beautiful, with a beautiful body but a demon's soul. Next time you see a pretty woman… and tell yourself how you would have liked to have a similar one for yourself… to have her as my wife, the mother of my children, you should finish the sentence and ask yourself "but what if she has the soul of the devil?…"*
>
> *"Women are the devil's messengers in this world."*

In one incident in which a woman has slit her husband's throat after he raped her and was sentenced for community service, the misogynist comments were even more prominent, while most female talkbackers were in favor of the woman and wrote comments such as "Way to go… neuter him…", "too bad he's not dead," etc., the men's talkbacks had a more misogynist nature, e.g. "no doubt you are a crazy feminist, and I will use a word that lots of you really likes, you are no more than a sl*t, it's scary to see in your picture that you have a baby who is under the care of a wacko like you."

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper was to inspect the social perceptions among Israeli talkbackers regarding female violence against their spouses. The findings of the study show that among the talkbackers community we can find high prominence of stereotypical attitudes towards domestic violence offences in general and to men and women who breach the traditional gender roles in particular (Rubenstein, 2012). One of the most common talkback was the ridiculing reference to the assaulted man. The disparagement is mostly directed at the foundation of his "masculinity". The most common, stereotypical assumption regarding male victimhood to female aggressiveness is that even if a woman should indeed attack a man, he will not be significantly physically harmed (Neftov, 2014). In addition, Ben-David (2014) argues that male victims refrain from complaining about their female spouses' violence as they fear they will be ridiculed and taunted, and will have to deal with derogatory names e.g. "wimp" and "pussy". On the other hand, the violent woman is perceived as masculine and brutal and the talkbackers attribute her with traits that most societies perceive as attributed to males, such as brutality and aggression. The attitude to this phenomenon is molded by stereotypes and myths that On the one hand, revolves around sex and gender roles (Davies & Rogers, 2006) and on the other hand, constructing the societal images of assailants and victims. As we observed in previous studies, in cases where the man becomes the victims, his image is undergoing rapid feminization and, as far as his surrounding community is concerned, he is also deprived of his masculinity as well (Neftov, 2014). In addition, when the woman was the

attacker, we found a high talkback reference to feminine traits and the woman's expected gender role, e.g. talkbackers reference to that assaulting woman's role as a mother. Ajzenstadt and Steinberg (1997) found, in their study, that when female offenders are involved, feminization of the criminal women went through the entire spectrum of offences, even the most severe ones such as assault and homicide. The gender division between masculine and feminine stereotypes created another theme that was uniquely prominent and refers to men as victims. This category included responses by men who presented themselves as victims of feminine violence by their spouses, shared their experiences and sympathized with the cases presented in the articles. Unlike the main characteristic of the feminine aggression's male victim (Neftov, 2014), i.e. to avoid reporting the assault to either the police or the health institutions up to the point of hiding it from family and friends, the internet – which defends the writer's anonymity and allows the beaten man to expose his condition and to share his emotions with the public without risking being labelled as a man dominated by a woman, including all the social derivative that accompany such an image in Israeli society.

The talkbacks demonstrate a patronizing and paternal attitude towards the assaulting women, which are allegedly expressed by two different responses emerging from a single source: the first type justifies or excuses the woman's behavior based on the perception of women as poor individuals who are incapable of rational thinking, thus they act with expressive violence; the other type of comments, which allegedly reflect a more positive approach, one that express forgiveness and understanding of the woman based on the perception that this person is unbalanced and suffers different mental disorders. The talkbackers repeatedly argued that the assaulting women suffer mental illnesses, personality disorders and even needed immediate psychiatric therapy. Attributing female violence to mental pathology is explained by researchers as an expression of the public fear of crimes and criminals, which are perceived as threats to social order and the individual's welfare (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This fear increases when discussing female offenders, which are considered to deviate from their gender roles (Ajzenstadt & Steinberg, 1997). Throughout history, criminal women were described differently than criminal men: crime and deviant behavior employed by women was diagnosed as pathological symptoms and illness. During medieval age, women suspected of deviant behavior were persecuted, locked up and burned as witches. As a rule, women who were considered to deviate from social norms were hospitalized in mental institutions (Shoham, 2010). Barnett (2005) found, in her study of the media and public's attitude towards murdering mothers, that the public's use of some kind of mental pathology as an excuse for female / maternal violence actually presents a comforting myth that allows the public to maintain the illusion of the "Good Mother" and reinforces the stereotype that women must feel love towards all creatures. The myth also serves as a defense mechanism of separation and expulsion, by positioning the attacking women as different, others, not-normal and non-feminine. In continuation to this perception, another theme was found. This theme reflected a more forgiving attitude towards the assaulting woman and includes comments that "forgive" or "excuse" the woman's violent behavior. The talkbacks describe the attacking woman as someone who had no other choice but to act violently against the man. Talkbackers expressed empathy and understanding towards the woman, and the harmed man was described as someone who deserved his punishment, one who is guilty of his own destiny and is not a victim at all. The woman's violent behavior arose as a response to a prolonged abuse from the man's part. Indeed, we can see in Mazeh's study (2014) of women who kill their husbands that these women are consistently presented in the verdicts as victims. He argues that feminist approaches that present the problem of domestic violence as a symptom of women's abuse by men draw a "pretty" picture according to which physical violence is applied solely by men. According to this approach, a woman killing her spouse necessarily means that he was violent

to her and victimized her to the breaking point where she could no longer barred her state (Mazeh. 2014). Furthermore, studies show that in many cases where men murder their wives, the trigger for the act of murder was jealousy or depression. Women, on the other hand, usually hurt their spouses as a response to violence initiated by the spouse (Brown, 1987; Jewkes, 2004), which can perhaps explain the sympathy and understanding arising from the public of talkbackers in this study. Moreover, Swan and Snow (2002) argue that female violent behavior can be understood only through examination of the violence their spouse shows them, i.e. women act violently only after their experienced violence from abusive partners. Jewkes (2004) found that there are two female executed crimes in which women will manage to evade the "malice" descriptions and not lose their humanity – the murder of a partner, in which the woman can be depicted as protecting herself from an abusive spouse, and the murder of children, where the woman is seen as one acting out of sadness and madness. In each of these cases the woman is treated as a victim who is not responsible for her own actions. Indeed, researchers who studied public myths and stereotypes along their influence on social attitudes towards the male victim phenomenon, found that the general public's main tendency was to attribute lesser responsibility for the act when the assailant was a woman, and assign greater guilt and reduced vulnerability when the victim was a man. This trend was most prominent with scenarios in which men were presented as victims of female assault (Davies & Rogers, 2006).

The category that included the most common arguments was the one regarding the system's inequality. This group of talkbacks included expressions of a sense of inequality by the system (both in the media and the law enforcement system, in general) where according to the talkbackers the system will always favor the women and be particularly severe with the men. This theme is the most prominent one, and appeared consistently in all of the abovementioned papers – the argument "what if it were the other way around" seem to shade over the entire issue of female violence towards men. Mazeh's study (2014) examined the legal attitude in Israel – and that of the courts towards violent women, particularly women who kill their partners. It found that the attitude of the state attorney (as well as the courts') towards these women was characterized with lenient approach. In the verdicts, the assaulting women are consistently described as victims, the courts attribute great importance to the woman's harsh life circumstances, being a mother, etc. In almost all examined incidents (except for one) the courts refrained from convicting the women with murder. This might suggest that the legal system usually refuses to label cases of women who murder their husbands as homicides.

The last theme found regarded online misogyny. This group of talkbacks was characterized with high levels of hostility and anger towards the female species and feminism in particular. Violent women – and particularly murderous women – were described by a myriad of mythical metaphors e.g. demons, the devil, monsters, witches, etc. the descriptions serves society's need to reduce their femininity and increase their monstrosity (Jewkes, 2004). Rosenthal (2010) claims that the hatred discourse took it up a notch when the hatred target, usually a certain group, is presented as a demon or part of the evil forces. The dichotomous view of women's perception as good or evil, according to many feminist attitudes, is used as means of supervising and drafting limitations for proper feminine behavior. According to Jewkes (2004), the response of the media and the public towards female offenders is far more negatively exaggerated than the response towards men. Negbi (2012) shows that the internet provides greater conspicuousness to female hatred and that feminism, as an equalize theory, has become the target of murderous virtual attacks.

The feminist movements' great work began in the 1970's and has greatly contributed to establishing the fact that women are the victims and men are the attackers. This activity reinforced the perception according to which domestic violence is a collective phenomenon related to preserving the patriarchal, social structure of today and woman's low social status in society (Gur, 2006). This "culture package" which has contributed in the past three decades to the construction of a social reality (female victim vs. male attacker) arouses a "counter-package" which responses are expressed as inequality arguments, where the woman will always be considered as the victim – even if she was the one employing violence against her spouse physically or via ignoring and/or ridiculing the issue of other men being victims of female violence.

Despite the great disadvantages of an online study which is based on anonymous answers, and therefore may gain a low "inclusion validity", those exact features, such as: spontaneous, authentic or unsupervised responsiveness are the ones that allows us to learn more about the perceptions among Israeli public, by addressing the "gut feeling responses" represented by the talkbacks as an authentic and genuine perspective regarding the way different parts of the Israeli public, who is still partly characterized by inclusion of masculine and militant attitudes, perceive violent crimes of women towards their partners.

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APPENDICES

1. A woman hit her husband and complained, he was arrested: http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=942252
2. Restriction order to a woman who assaulted her husband: http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/941/476.html
3. Thought her husband was cheating on her, so she beat him: http://www.mako.co.il/news-law/crime/Article-58290fb72cf6a31004.htm
4. The beaten husband won, the woman was forced to divorce him: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4504467,00.html
5. Hit her husband with a vase on the head and acquitted from manslaughter charges: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3502491,00.html.
6. Slit her husband's throat due to sexual coercion – will only do six months of community service: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4574546,00.html
7. This woman does not just bug her husband, she abuses him: http://www.mako.co.il/women-magazine/diva/Article-cbeb79dbd9eba41006.htm
8. Wide female violence against men: http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/288200
9. Accusation: the murderer abused her spouse for many hours: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2739616,00.html
10. The Supreme Court reduced the punishment of a beaten woman who killed her husband: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3658847,00.html
11. Life time in prison for "Pippi Longstocking" who murdered her boyfriend with a skewer: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3030388,00.html
12. Suspicion in Eilat: A security woman murdered her husband: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3951387,00.html
13. Sixteen years to the woman who stabbed her husband to death at the Kineret: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3726095,00.html
14. The woman who caused her husband's death: this is a disaster: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3522995,00.html
15. My wife beats me and then starts crying: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4621970,00.html
16. A woman can also rape: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3569053,00.html
17. Boris Becker: "My wife beat me when I was cheating": http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4433655,00.html
18. Supreme Court: Stabbed her spouse to death and will not be convicted for murder: http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3672353,00.html
19. Real men do not complain: http://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/1.1616335#article-comments
20. Why do abused men keep taking it and keep quiet? http://www.nrg.co.il/online/55/ART2/589/561.html